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The Story of a Button

And Why We Should Salute Its Wearers

(Hugh O'Neill in The Denver Times, Aug. 13, 1911.)

Next time you see a man wearing the Button of the Loyal Legion, salute him. We are not much given to reverence in these days; we have not yet learned that it is a good and a proper thing to stand up in a theatre when the band plays the national anthem, or to bare our heads when it is played in the open air; but we are coming to all that gradually and we ought to include the men who wear the Button in our ritual.

And we should understand why we do it, too.

It is not because the men who wear this Button have just FOUGHT in the Civil War; war is a bad thing at the best and the desire to carry arms and go into battle is a common, human desire that is universal to mankind. The men who wear the first class Button of the Loyal Legion fought, and fought well, but they did something finer and more admirable than that, and because of this other thing they have earned our open show of respect.

For instance, there was one man who lived in Missouri when the Civil War broke out.

He was a well-to-do man, a wealthy farmer who owned many slaves. He had graduated from Yale, as had his father before him. His "vested interest" in his slaves was extensive.

He might have sat in comfort under his own fig-tree right through that war had he so chosen. He might have cared for his crops and his family. There were a thousand reasons why he might well have kept out of trouble.

His wife was young. They had a family of young children.

But this man believed down in the soul of him that this country should remain a united Nation.

He believed that it was his duty to do all that he could to keep it

united. So, believing these things truly, he enlisted as a private in the Union army, where he distinguished himself and gained promotion.

But, to do that, he had to leave his young wife and his family to take care of themselves, and that took more courage than shouldering a rifle and firing into the smoke as the regiment charged the enemy, yelling and red-eyed.

The man did it, though, and went away and his wife stayed at home doing the best she could to manage the farm and care for the slaves.

It was a great thing this wife did, too; steady and patient and courageous. And the shining memorial and token of it all is this red, white and blue Button that you see now and then on the coat-lapel of some modest servant of the Republic.

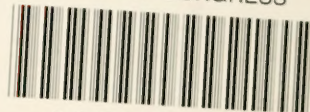
So, this Button is worth saluting, isn't it. It is worth saluting, not because the wearer of it risked his life in battles where the risk of life was a light thing and easily forgotten; but because he left his home in jeopardy and returned in numberless cases to find his wealth gone and himself a poor man with the struggle against hardship heavy and, for his only recompense, the knowledge that he had done his duty.

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